



City of New London

Office of the Mayor

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February 27, 2018

Testimony Before The Public Health Committee

HB 5149, "An Act Concerning Sober Living Homes"

Good morning Senator Gerratana, Senator Somers, Representative Steinberg and members of the Public Health Committee. My name is Michael Passero, and I am the Mayor of the City of New London. Thank you for the opportunity to testify this morning. I am joined this morning by Human Services Director Jeanne Milstein.

We are here to offer strong support for Proposed H.B. No. 5149, "An Act Concerning Sober Living Homes."

The City of New London has been significantly impacted by the opioid crisis that is currently devastating Connecticut. The data shows that from 2016-2018 there were 16 fatal opioid related incidents and 187 non-fatal opiate related incidents deaths in New London for a total of 203 cases.

We are working tirelessly with many dedicated partners including families, law enforcement, fire and EMS personnel, treatment providers, healthcare providers, businesses, and non-profits to prevent, support, and treat those impacted by this destructive public health crisis.

As a community, we recognize that there is a pressing need for a continuum of services for those afflicted with the disease. Recovery housing is integral in providing services to our neighbors. With that said, the world of sober houses is not transparent. People have tragically died in our sober houses, the most recent fatality only a few months ago. Shockingly, one home had two fatalities in the last few years. It is appalling that sober houses are subject to absolutely no oversight, accountability, or standards other than health, building, and fire codes. It is unacceptable that often times we first learn about the existence of a sober house when there is a fatality or police interaction with the house.

The Building Official in the City of New London has condemned three houses of ONE OWNER just within the last several years. In addition, there were two other condemnations. This is unacceptable. There were four working fires (not including minor stoves incidents, etc.), but serious working fires.

We are fortunate for the few sober houses that are operated under the jurisdiction of non-profits. These homes are role models that have standards for care and help residents recover and heal. The proposed bill is an important step forward to bring all sober houses up to an acceptable standard and

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to help our neighbors have a successful recovery. In addition, during the last year, the City of New London is the first community in the State to partner with Yale New Haven Health (Lawrence and Memorial Hospital) and Community Speaks Out to offer a voluntary certification program. One property owner has successfully completed the process. In addition, I am proposing a City Ordinance that will require accountability as well. However, this is not enough. We need State oversight and accountability of these homes.

HB 5149 allows a sober house to register with the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. In addition, any residence that registers must maintain a supply of opioid antagonists on the premises and provide training on the administration of opioid antagonists to all residents. If they do not register, they would not be allowed to register as a sober living home. This does not go far enough. I respectfully urge you to go further. I propose a certification program to be implemented statewide, similar to the one launched in 2014 by the State of Massachusetts. Sober houses that choose to become certified will be held responsible for maintaining nationally recognized standards of practices that support an effective recovery environment. I assure you that this proposal has no fiscal impact.

Additionally, I propose the creation of a list of the sober houses that are certified from which state agencies and state-funded programs will adhere to for their referrals. This does not prohibit uncertified sober houses from operating, but the houses that do not choose to become certified will not be added to this list; and, government money should only be given to houses that are certified.

When an individual in recovery enters a sober house, he or she is under the assumption that they are entering a safe living environment in which to recover from the gripping disease of addiction. I am not proposing anything outrageous, but rather a simple way to bring sober houses up to a standard that our communities, our neighbors, our friends, and our families deserve. I ask you one question: What if this was your son, daughter, niece or nephew? Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,



Michael E. Passero, Mayor
City of New London